

God Saves by Loving First That the World Might Be Saved 4

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Faith Presbyterian Church, Sierra Vista AZ
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Ephesians 2:1-10; John 3:14-21

At a Presbytery committee meeting this week I asked folks where they might have seen John 3:16 out in the wild. Interestingly, the only example that we could remember was at football games, and not very recently.

Today we will focus on this famous passage with its famous verse, and what a gift we have!

Let's set the stage.

This encounter between the Jewish leader Nicodemus and Jesus at night is really an across-the-boundaries experience. It comes after Jesus has upset the Temple authorities by overturning the tables of the marketplace at the Temple.

While he has upset some, others in the Jewish leadership find his message to be compelling, but they know that Jesus is someone that you don't visit openly because he is controversial – he's just upset the temple authorities by overturning the tables in the marketplace.

I wonder what longings Nicodemus brought to Jesus that night.
I wonder what longings we might have for Jesus today.

The World of John

Nicodemus a series of questions designed to understand Jesus' theology. It ends up with Jesus declaring his own mission statement. Let me read another version of this passage from The Message paraphrase:

¹⁶⁻¹⁸"This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life. God didn't go to all the trouble of sending his Son merely to point an accusing finger, telling the world how bad it was. He came to help, to put the world right again.

I wonder how these words were received by Nicodemus, to hear clearly that God has now come to save the world?

I wonder how these words might affect someone hearing them for the first time today?

Ephesians

Our other scripture reading from Ephesians has a similar theme. The passage literally starts by reminding the hearers that “you were dead” but quickly reminds them that through God’s mercy and great love for us, that we have been made alive together with Christ! That we have been moved from the land of the dead and into the places where there are seats for us.

All these things are a gift of from our God who loves us!

For us today, we receive these words as the ultimate gift from God – that with God’s light as a sign for us, we can avoid the darkness and being destroyed – in fact, God came for us to be saved from death, into life!

I don’t know if anyone has ever saved you from a dangerous experience, but I have. Back in the 1980s, I went white water rafting, and fell out of the boat at the top of the rapid. It was one of my most vivid times of realizing that I could die.

I didn’t thanks to a few people (a long story that I’ll tell you all another day), but I had tremendous gratitude afterwards. I had been given a gift – my body and soul were in one piece. People who knew more and were skilled came to save me when I couldn’t save myself.

In her book, *Amazing Grace*, Kathleen Norris tells of a faculty professor who had been diagnosed with cancer, and after having almost died three times, and extensive treatment, she found herself in remission.

While her prognosis was unclear, she told her department head, “I’d never want to go back because now I know what each morning means, and I am so grateful just to be alive.” When the other woman said to her, “We’ve been through so much together the last few years,” the younger woman nodded, and smiled. “Yes,” she said emphatically. “Yes! And hasn’t it been a blessing!”¹

¹ Kathleen Norris, *Amazing Grace, a Vocabulary of Faith* (New York, NY: Riverhead Books, 1998), 13.

God saves all the time – when we fumble in our lives and lose our way, when we succumb to alcohol or other addictive substances, when we find ourselves breaking commitments to work, family and or friends. God’s saving work can begin for us in a flash, but keeps going and going.

This is what it is like to receive the gift of life from God – God’s grace. You get this big present and it looks so amazing that you can’t believe it’s for you. It just seems too incredible!

And you open it up and find – all other kinds of gifts too! So many that you try to hold onto them, but really you have to start giving them away to others. What are these gifts?

peace

love

forgiveness

kindness

hope

justice

mercy

grace

community

inclusion

So friends, I hope that you have experienced the saving love and grace of God. If God has blessed you richly with these gifts, I invite you to share them with the world!

Amen.